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Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy

Whoever is concerned with political philosophy must face the fact that in the last two generations political philosophy has lost its credibility. Political philosophy has lost its credibility in proportion as politics itself has become more philosophic than ever in a sense. Almost throughout its whole history political philosophy was universal while politics was particular. Political philosophy was concerned with the best or just order of society which is by nature best or just everywhere or always, while politics is concerned with the being and well-being of this or that particular society (a polis, a nation, an empire) that is in being at a given place for some time. Not a few men have dreamt of rule over all human beings by themselves or others but they were dreamers or at least regarded as such by the philosophers. In our age on the other hand politics has in fact become universal. Unrest in what is loosely, not to say demagogically, called the ghetto of an American city has repercussions in Moscow, Peking, Johannesburg, Hanoi, London, and other far away places and is linked with them; whether the linkage is admitted or not makes no difference. Simultaneously political philosophy has disappeared. This is quite obvious in the East where the Communists themselves call their doctrine their ideology. As for the contemporary West, the intellectual powers peculiar to it are neo-positivism and existentialism. Positivism surpasses existentialism by far in academic influence and existentialism surpasses positivism by far in popular influence. Positivism may be described as the view according to which only scientific knowledge is genuine knowledge; since scientific knowledge is unable to validate or invalidate any value judgments, and political philosophy most certainly is concerned with the

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validation of sound value judgments and the invalidation of unsound ones, positivism must reject political philosophy as radically unscientific. Existentialism appears in a great variety of guises but one will not be far wide of the mark if one defines it in contradistinction to positivism as the view according to which all principles of understanding and of action are historical, i.e. have no other ground than groundless human decision or fateful dispensation: science, far from being the only kind of genuine knowledge, is ultimately not more than one form among many of viewing the world, all these forms have the same dignity. Since according to existentialism all human thought is historical in the sense indicated, existentialism must reject political philosophy as radically unhistorical.

Existentialism is a "movement" which like all such movements has a flabby periphery and a hard center. That center is the thought of Heidegger. To that thought alone existentialism owes its importance or intellectual respectability. There is no room for political philosophy in Heidegger's work, and this may well be due to the fact that the room in question is occupied by gods or the gods. This does not mean that Heidegger is wholly alien to politics: he welcomed Hitler's revolution in 1933 and he, who had never praised any other contemporary political effort, still praised national socialism long after Hitler had been muted and Heil Hitler had been transformed into Heil Unheil. We cannot help holding these facts against Heidegger. Moreover, one is bound to misunderstand Heidegger's thought radically if one does not see their intimate connection with the core of his philosophic thought. Nevertheless, they afford too small a basis for the proper understanding of his thought. As far as I can see, he is of the opinion that none of his critics and none of his followers has understood him adequately. I believe that he is right, for is the same not also true, more or less, of all outstanding thinkers? This does not dispense us, however, from taking a stand toward him, for we do this at any rate implicitly; in doing it explicitly, we run no greater risk than exposing ourselves to ridicule and perhaps receiving some needed instruction.

Among the many things that make Heidegger's thought so appealing to so many contemporaries is his accepting the premise that while human life and thought is radically historical, History is not a rational process. As a consequence, he denies that one can understand a thinker better than he understood himself and even as he understood himself: a great thinker will understand an earlier thinker of rank creatively, i.e. by transforming his thought, and hence by understanding him differently than he understood himself. One could hardly observe this transformation if one could not see the original form. Above all, according to Heidegger all thinkers prior to him have been oblivious of the true ground of all grounds, the fundamental abyss. This assertion implies the claim that in the decisive respect Heidegger understands his great predecessors better than they understood themselves.

In order to understand Heidegger's thought and therefore in particular his posture toward politics and political philosophy, one must not neglect the work of his teacher Husserl. The access to Husserl is not rendered difficult by any false step like those taken by Heidegger in 1933 and 1953. I have heard it said though that the Husserlian equivalent was his conversion, not proceeding from conviction, to Christianity. If this were proven to be the case, it would become a task for a casuist of exceptional gifts to consider the dissimilarities and similarities of the two kinds of acts and to weigh their respective demerits and merits.

When I was still almost a boy, Husserl explained to me who at that time was a doubting and dubious adherent of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism, the characteristic of his own work in about these terms: "the Marburg school begins with the roof, while I begin with the foundation." This meant that for the school of Marburg the sole task of the fundamental part of philosophy was the theory of scientific experience, the analysis of scientific thought. Husserl however had realized more profoundly than anybody else that the scientific understanding of the world, far from being the perfection of our natural understanding, is derivative from the latter in such a way as to make us oblivious of the very foundations of the scientific understanding: all philosophic understanding must start from our common understanding of the world, from our understanding of the world as sensibly perceived prior to all theorizing. Heidegger went much further than Husserl in the same direction: the primary theme is not the object of perception but the full thing as experienced as part of the individual human context, the individual world to which it belongs.[1] The full thing is what it is not only in virtue of the primary and secondary qualities as well as the value qualities in the ordinary meaning of that term but also of qualities like sacred or profane: the full phenomenon of a cow is for a Hindu constituted much more by the sacredness of the cow than by any other quality or aspect. This implies that one can no longer speak of our "natural" understanding of the world; every understanding of the world is "historical." Correspondingly, one must go back behind the one human reason to the multiplicity of historical, "grown" not "made," languages. Accordingly there arises the philosophic task of understanding the universal structure common to all historical worlds.[2] Yet if the insight into the historicity of all thought is to be preserved, the understanding of the universal or essential structure of all historical worlds must be accompanied and in a way guided by that insight. This means that the understanding of the essential structure of all historical worlds must be understood as essentially belonging to a specific historical context, to a specific historical period. The character of the historicist insight must corre-

1. Cf. *Sein und Zeit* sect. 21 (pp. 98–99).
2. For this and what follows see H. G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* 233–34; cf. 339–40; pp. xix and 505 of the second edition.

spond to the character of the period to which it belongs. The historicist insight is the final insight in the sense that it reveals all earlier thought as radically defective in the decisive respect and that there is no possibility of another legitimate change in the future which would render obsolete or as it were mediatise the historicist insight. As the absolute insight it must belong to the absolute moment in history. In a word, the difficulty indicated compels Heidegger to elaborate, sketch or suggest what in the case of any other man would be called his philosophy of history.

The absolute moment may be the absolute moment simply or the absolute moment of all previous history. That it is the absolute moment simply had been the contention of Hegel. His system of philosophy, the final philosophy, the perfect solution of all philosophic problems belongs to the moment when mankind has solved in principle its political problem by establishing the post-revolutionary state, the first state to recognize the equal dignity of every human being as such. This absolute peak of history, being the end of history, is at the same time the beginning of the final decline. In this respect Spengler has merely brought out the ultimate conclusion of Hegel's thought. No wonder therefore that almost everyone rebelled against Hegel. No one did this more effectively than Marx. Marx claimed to have laid bare with finality the mystery of all history, including the present and the imminent future, but also the outline of the order which was bound to come and in which and through which men would be able or compelled for the first time to lead truly human lives. More precisely, for Marx human history, so far from having been completed, has not even begun; what we call history is only the pre-history of humanity. Questioning the settlement which Hegel had regarded as rational, he followed the vision of a world society which presupposes and establishes forever the complete victory of the town over the country, of the mobile over the deeply rooted, of the spirit of the Occident over the spirit of the Orient; the members of the world society which is no longer a political society are free and equal, and are so in the last analysis because all specialization, all division of labor, has given way to the full development of everyone.

Regardless of whether or not Nietzsche knew of Marx' writings, he questioned the communist vision more radically than anyone else. He identified the man of the communist world society as the last man, as man in his utmost degradation: without "specialization," without the harshness of limitation, human nobility and greatness are impossible. In accordance with this he denied that the future of the human race is predetermined. The alternative to the last man is the over-man, a type of man surpassing and overcoming all previous human types in greatness and nobility; the over-men of the future will be ruled invisibly by the philosophers of the future. Owing to its radical anti-egalitarianism Nietzsche's vision of a possible future is in a sense more profoundly political than Marx' vision. Like the typical Continental European conservative Nietzsche saw in communism only the completion of democratic egalitarianism and of the liberalistic demand for freedom which is not a "freedom for" but only a "freedom from." But in contradistinction to those conservatives he held that conservatism as such is doomed, since all merely defensive positions, all merely backward looking endeavors are doomed. The future seemed to be with democracy and nationalism. Both were regarded by Nietzsche as incompatible with what he held to be the task of the twentieth century. He saw the twentieth century as an age of world wars leading up to planetary rule. If man were to have a future, that rule would have to be exercised by a united Europe. The enormous tasks of this unprecedented iron age could not possibly be discharged by weak and unstable governments depending upon public opinion. The new situation called for the emergence of a new nobility—a nobility formed by a new ideal: the nobility of the over-men. Nietzsche claimed to have discovered with finality the mystery of all history, including the present, i.e. the alternative whch now confronts man, of the utmost degradation and the highest exaltation. The possibility of surpassing and overcoming all previous human types reveals itself to the present, less because the present is superior to all past ages than because it is the moment of the greatest danger and chiefly for this reason of the greatest hope.

Heidegger's philosophy of history has the same structure as Marx' and Nietzsche's: the moment in which the final insight is arriving opens the eschatological prospect. But Heidegger is much closer to Nietzsche than to Marx. Both thinkers regard as decisive the nihilism which according to them began in Plato (or before)—Christianity being only Platonism for the people—and whose ultimate consequence is the present decay. Hitherto every great age of humanity grew out of *Bodenständigkeit* (rootedness in the soil). Yet the great age of classical Greece gave birth to a way of thinking which in principle endangered *Bodenständigkeit* from the beginning and in its ultimate contemporary consequences is about to destroy the last relics of that condition of human greatness. Heidegger's philosophy belongs to the infinitely dangerous moment when man is in a greater danger than ever before of losing his humanity and therefore—danger and salvation belonging together—philosophy can have the task of contributing toward the recovery or return of *Bodenständigkeit* or rather of preparing an entirely novel kind of *Bodenständigkeit:* a *Bodenständigkeit* beyond the most extreme *Bodenlosigkeit*, a being at home beyond the most extreme homelessness. Nay, there are reasons for thinking that according to Heidegger the world has never yet been in order, or thought has never yet been simply human. A dialogue between the most profound thinkers of the Occident and the most profound thinkers of the Orient and in particular East Asia may lead to the consummation prepared, accompanied or followed by a return of the gods. That dialogue and everything that it entails, but surely not political action of any

kind, is perhaps the way.[3] Heidegger severs the connection of the vision with politics more radically than either Marx or Nietzsche. One is inclined to say that Heidegger has learned the lesson of 1933 more thoroughly than any other man. Surely he leaves no place whatever for political philosophy.

Let us turn from these fantastic hopes, more to be expected from visionaries than from philosophers, to Husserl. Let us see whether a place for political philosophy is left in Husserl's philosophy.

What I am going to say is based on a re-reading, after many years of neglect, of Husserl's programmatic essay "Philosophy as Rigorous Science." The essay was first published in 1911, and Husserl's thought underwent many important changes afterward. Yet it is his most important utterance on the question with which we are concerned.

No one in our century has raised the call for philosophy as a rigorous science with such clarity, purity, vigor, and breadth as Husserl. "From its first beginnings philosophy has raised the claim to be a rigorous science; more precisely, it has raised the claim to be the science that would satisfy the highest theoretical needs and in regard to ethics and religion render possible a life regulated by pure rational norms. This claim . . . has never been completely abandoned. [Yet] in no epoch of its development has philosophy been capable of satisfying the claim to be a rigorous science . . . Philosophy as science has not yet begun . . . In philosophy [in contradistinction to the sciences] everything is controversial."[4]

Husserl found the most important example of the contrast between claim and achievement in "the reigning naturalism." (In the present context the difference between naturalism and positivism is unimportant.) In that way of thinking the intention toward a new foundation of philosophy in the spirit of rigorous science is fully alive. This constitutes its merit and at the same time a great deal of its force. Perhaps the idea of science is altogether the most powerful idea in modern life. Surely nothing can stop the victorious course of science which in its ideal completion is Reason itself that cannot tolerate any authority at its side or above it. Husserl respects naturalism especially for keeping alive the notion of a "philosophy from the ground up" in opposition to the traditional notion of philosophy as "system." At the same time he holds that naturalism necessarily destroys all objectivity.[5]

By naturalism Husserl understands the view according to which everything that is forms part of nature, "nature" being understood as the object of (modern) natural science. This means that everything that is is either itself

3. *Was heisst Denken?* 31, 153–54; *Der Satz vom Grund* 101; *Einführung in die Metaphysik* 28; *Wegmarken* 250–52; *Gelassenheit* 16–26.

4. *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, ed. W. Szilasi, sects. 1, 2, 4 and 5. I have made use of the English translation by Lauer in Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, Harper Torch Books, pp. 71–147.

5. Sects. 7–8, 11, 13, 14, 17, 65.

"physical" or if it is "psychic" it is a mere dependent variable of the physical, "in the best case a secondary parallel accompaniment." As a consequence, naturalism "naturalizes" both the consciousness and all norms (logical, ethical and so on). That form of naturalism which called for Husserl's special attention was experimental psychology as meant to supply the scientific foundation of logic, theory of knowledge, esthetics, ethics, and pedagogic. That psychology claimed to be the science of the phenomena themselves, or of "the psychic phenomena," i.e. of that which physics in principle excludes in order to look for "the true, objective, physically-exact nature," or for the nature which presents itself in the phenomena. Stated in very imprecise language, psychology deals with the secondary qualities as such which physics, solely concerned with the primary qualities, excludes. In more precise language, one would have to say that the psychic phenomena precisely because they are phenomena are not nature.[6]

As theory of knowledge naturalism must give an account of natural science, of its truth or validity. But every natural science accepts nature in the sense in which nature is intended by natural science, as given, as "being in itself." The same is of course true of psychology which is based on the science of physical nature. Hence naturalism is completely blind to the riddles inherent in the "givenness" of nature. It is constitutionally incapable of a radical critique of experience as such. The scientific positing or taking for granted of nature is preceded by and based upon the prescientific one, and the latter is as much in need of radical clarification as the first. Hence an adequate theory of knowledge cannot be based on the naive acceptance of nature in any sense of nature. The adequate theory of knowledge must be based on scientific knowledge of the consciousness as such, for which nature and being are correlates or intended objects that constitute themselves in and through consciousness alone, in pure "immanence"; "nature" or "being" must be made "completely intelligible." Such a radical clarification of every possible object of consciousness can be the task only of a phenomenology of the consciousness in contradistinction to the naturalistic science of psychic phenomena. Only phenomenology can supply that fundamental clarification of the consciousness and its acts the lack of which makes so-called exact psychology radically unscientific, for the latter constantly makes use of concepts which stem from every-day experience without having examined them as to their adequacy.[7]

According to Husserl it is absurd to ascribe to phenomena a nature: phenomena appear in an "absolute flux," an "eternal flux," while "nature is eternal." Yet precisely because phenomena have no natures, they have essences. Phenomenology is essentially the study of essences and in no way

6. Sects. 14, 15, 19, 42, 46–48.

7. Sects. 20–27, 29, 30, 32–42.

of existence. In accordance with this the study of the life of the mind as practiced by the thoughtful historians offers to the philosopher a more original and therefore more fundamental material of inquiry than the study of nature.[8] If this is so, the study of men's religious life must be of greater philosophic relevance than the study of nature.

Philosophy as rigorous science was threatened in the second place by a way of thinking which under the influence of historicism was about to turn into mere *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*. *Weltanschauung* is life-experience of a high order. It includes not only experience of the world but also religious, esthetic, ethical, political, practical-technical etc. experience. The man who possesses such experience on a very high level is called wise and is said to possess a *Weltanschauung*. Husserl can therefore speak of "wisdom or *Weltanschauung*." According to him wisdom or *Weltanschauung* is an essential ingredient of that still more valuable habitus which we mean by the idea of perfect virtue or by the idea of humanity. *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* comes into being when the attempt is made to conceptualize wisdom or to give it a logical elaboration or, more simply, to give it the form of science; this ordinarily goes together with the attempt to use the results of the special sciences as materials. This kind of philosophy, when taking on the form of one or the other of the great systems, presents the relatively most perfect solution of the riddles of life and the world. The traditional philosophies were at the same time *Weltanschauungsphilosophien* and scientific philosophies since the objectives of wisdom on the one hand and of rigorous science on the other had not yet been clearly separated from one another. But for the modern consciousness the separation of the ideas of wisdom and of rigorous science has become a fact and they remain henceforth separated for all eternity. The idea of *Weltanschauung* differs from epoch to epoch while the idea of science is supra-temporal. One might think that the realizations of the two ideas would approach each other asymptotically in the infinite. Yet "we cannot wait"; we need "exaltation and consolation" now; we need some kind of system to live by; only *Weltanschauung* or *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* can satisfy these justified demands.[9] Surely philosophy as rigorous science cannot satisfy them: it has barely begun, it will need centuries, if not millennia, until it "renders possible in regard to ethics and religion a life regulated by pure rational norms," if it is not at all times essentially incomplete and in need of radical revisions. Hence the temptation to forsake it in favor of *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* is very great. From Husserl's point of view one would have to say that Heidegger proved unable to resist that temptation.

The reflection on the relation of the two kinds of philosophy obviously belongs to the sphere of philosophy as rigorous science. It comes closest to

8. Sects. 49–50, 54, 56, 57, 59, 72.
9. Sects. 13, 67, 75–79, 81, 82, 90, 91.

being Husserl's contribution to political philosophy. He did not go on to wonder whether the single-minded pursuit of philosophy as rigorous science would not have an adverse effect on *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* which most men need to live by and hence on the actualization of the ideas which that kind of philosophy serves, in the first place in the practitioners of philosophy as rigorous science but secondarily also in all those who are impressed by those practitioners. He seems to have taken it for granted that there will always be a variety of *Weltanschauungsphilosophien* that peacefully coexist within one and the same society. He did not pay attention to societies that impose a single *Weltanschauung* or *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* on all their members and for this reason will not tolerate philosophy as rigorous science. Nor did he consider that even a society that tolerates indefinitely many *Weltanschauungen* does this by virtue of one particular *Weltanschauung*.

Husserl in a manner continued, he surely modified the reflection we have been speaking about, under the impact of events which could not be overlooked or overheard. In a lecture delivered in Prague in 1935 he said: "Those who are conservatively contented with the tradition and the circle of philosophic human beings will fight one another, and surely the fight will take place in the sphere of political power. Already in the beginnings of philosophy persecution sets in. The men who live toward those ideas [of philosophy] are outlawed. And yet: ideas are stronger than all empirical powers."[10] In order to see the relation between philosophy as rigorous science and the alternative to it clearly, one must look at the political conflict between the two antagonists, i.e. at the essential character of that conflict. If one fails to do so, one cannot reach clarity on the essential character of what Husserl calls "philosophy as rigorous science."

10. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die tranzendentale Phänomenologie*, second edition, Haag 1962, 335.